Two Yahgan and Four Ona Myths

recorded by Roberto Dabbene in 1902

Adapted from:

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Translated from Spanish to English

by Eric Paul Bredvik (revised by Jan Jokisch),

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Yahgan Myths

Legend of the Hero Oumoara

Adapted from: p. 66 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Time of recording: 1902

In a cave on Gable Island in the Beagle Channel there was a monster which assaulted all the canoes that passed near its lair and ate those who manned them. A young man, short of stature and very skilled in the handling of the harpoon and the arrow, resolved to rid the country of this monster and alone in his canoe went to meet it at the entrance of the cavern. The monster, on seeing him, rushed upon him, but the bold Indian, without being frightened, with several stones thrown skillfully by his sling, burst his eyes. Then the monster was blinded, and he finished it off with his harpoons.

Legend of the Stone Man

Adapted from: p. 66–67 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Time of recording: 1902

One day a young Indian girl saw a stone of special shape, and she liked it so much that she never left it. Her father, seeing

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her always cleaning and playing with that stone, became angry and, taking it from her, threw it into the sea, near an island, close to the bay of Ushuaia.

The stone did not go to the bottom, but slid down to a small inlet of Nayarino Island, and there it was transformed into a giant whose body was made of stone, but with human hands and feet.

This giant hid in the woods of the bay and came out to surprise the passing canoes, killing the men and taking all the women to his wigwam. Once, in one of those canoes that the stone man assaulted, there was a boy, who managed to escape the slaughter, and the giant's women hid him in the vicinity of the wigwam, determined to save him. One day the giant went to gather mushrooms in the bush and got a thorn in his foot. When he returned, he stretched out his leg to his women to have the thorn removed, but they then took advantage of the occasion and, under the pretext of looking for the thorn in the flesh, made a large hole in the sole of his foot, so that the giant could no longer stand up, and spent his days lying in the wigwam. Then, the women decided to get rid of him. They called the child they had hidden and had taken care of, and he, with his harpoon, wounded the stone man in the eye, thus causing his death. The women set fire to the wigwam and burned it with the giant until nothing remained but ashes.

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Ona Myths

The Sun Ké-erren and the Moon Ké-re

Adapted from: p. 76–77 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Time of recording: 1902

Ké-erren was a great hunter and the most beautiful man of his time. One day he returned from hunting loaded with guanaco meat, when he saw his wife Ké-re talking with another woman at the edge of a lake. As Ké-erren approached them and listened, he understood that Ké-re had uncovered a secret that only men should know and was telling it to the other so that all the women would be disillusioned. So, he swiftly hit Ké-re in the face, causing the bruises that today appear as spots on the moon. Ké-re fled and Ké-erren followed her and so they crossed the whole earth, finally Ké-re reached a high cliff over the sea and without hesitation jumped. Ké-erren in turn threw himself after her to follow her and so they continue to this day; but Ké-erren [the sun] has never been able to reach Ké-re [the moon], his wife.

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The Reason Why Sun Hides at Night

Adapted from: p. 77 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Time of recording: 1902

Once upon a time, there was a famous shaman Coan-yi-pej. He was the most famous man of his time. Having fallen in love one day with a young Indian girl, he shared with her his desire to marry her. At that time, the sun still followed the moon in the heavens without yet hiding behind the horizon.

The woman replied that she would not consent to be his wife because the sun was watching her. To which Coan-yi-pej replied that he had the power to hide the sun until they were married. Indeed, the sun, resting from its race, stopped below the horizon. Since then it happens that sometimes the sun takes longer to rise and to shine in the sky [which is the winter]; while other times it shows itself for a longer time [the summer].

The Tame Guanaco

Adapted from: p. 77–78 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Time of recording: 1902

Once upon a time the guanaco was not the unruly animal that it is nowadays. It was tame and used to come to graze close to

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the encampments of the Ona. One afternoon Coan-yi-pej and his son passed by near a very old one of these animals, which upon seeing them approached them. However, the frightened boy went to hide next to his father, who took a fiery ember and threw it at the guanaco, which fled to the bush. There it met the fox, which told it, »Don't you know that the humans care for you only because you serve to satisfy their hunger?« From then on the guanaco stayed away from the Ona encampments and went to the top of the hills, where it joined the H-gor-re [the yellow clay]. Because of this their offspring have a yellowish skin. According to the Ona, it is prohibited to hunt guanacos on Mt. Haupin, because there it has its home and if an Ona were to kill them in that place, they would soon disappear.

The White Stone of Can-a-iul

Adapted from:	p. 78 in the primary source
Narrator:	unidentified
Time of recording:	1902

Can-a-iul, like, Coan-yi-pej, had the reputation of being a great shaman.

Many years ago (as many as the hands of ten men) he went on a journey with some companions to the country of the Yahgan [Sloggett Bay] and saw many of these Indians eating the flesh of a whale that had been stranded on the beach. The Ona, also wishing to eat, left their weapons and approached the Yahgan

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with signs of peace. But the latter, seeing them without weapons, when they were near them, attacked them with their slingshots and harpoons and killed them all.

Coan-yi-jul also fell, pierced by harpoons, but it seemed like his head did not want to die like his body.

The Yahgan then cut it off and with astonishment they saw that head begin to jump and walk. Reaching the edge of the forest, it turned around and burst out laughing.

All those who saw and heard it then died.

The head continued on its way to Punta S. Diego and from there, passing Cape Penas, it headed north to Rio Grande. It went so swiftly that it caught up with the guanacos, which it killed. Today the head is transformed into a white stone that can be seen near Mount Olivia. Sometimes it goes on a journey through the hills and all who come across it get sick and die.

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